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ABSTRACT

Faced with pragmatic concerns such as the declining economy, university support, and increasing student enrollment, the Department of Communication Arts at the University of Dayton (Ohio) during the 1978-79 academic year was compelled to consider alternatives to the traditional method of using full-time faculty to instruct the basic public speaking course. While several alternative instructional methods were considered, the department elected to employ undergraduate communication majors as facilitators in the basic course. Three factors influenced this decision: the increase in communication majors and the subsequent shortage of full-time faculty members, the potential for overreliance on part-time faculty, and the unavailability of graduate teaching assistants. Having met stringent selection criteria, those students chosen as facilitators were required to undergo training during the spring semester of their junior year. Course and instructor evaluations did not reveal significant differences between the evaluations of the facilitators and full-time faculty, part-time faculty, or graduate teaching assistants. After four years of use, the undergraduate facilitator program has provided the department with reductions in operating expenses, decreased dependence on part-time staff, and an opportunity to allow undergraduate students a tremendous educational experience.(HOD)

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STAFFING THE BASIC PUBLIC SPEAKING COURSE: AN EVALUATION OF AN UNDERGRADUATE FACILITATOR PROGRAM

Don B. Morlan

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ABSTRACT

This study describes the use of undergraduate facilitators as one means of staffing the basic public speaking course. The rationale for using undergraduates, the criteria for selecting facilitators and a brief discussion of the training program are included with an evaluation of the program's effectiveness and the student acceptance of being instructed and evaluated by other undergraduate students. Results indicate the undergraduate facilitator program is one successful alternative to traditional instruction in the basic course.

During the 1978-1979 academic year, the Department of Communication Arts at The University of Dayton found it necessary to consider alternative methods of instructing the basic public speaking course. Pragmatic concerns, such as the declining economy, University support, and increasing student enrollment compelled the Department to consider alternatives to the traditional method of using full time faculty to instruct the basic course.

While several alternative instructional methods were considered (e.g. using part time instructors, videotaping lectures, increasing class size, and increasing the number of graduate students as teaching assistants), the Department elected to employ undergraduate Communication majors as facilitators in the basic course. Such innovative use of undergraduates is not without precedence and this method has been shown to be one successful method of staffing a basic course given existing levels of administrative support for Departments of Communication.[1]

The rationale for adopting undergraduate facilitators was initially a pragmatic response to the Department's needs and the situational constraints that made fulfilling those needs a difficult administrative task. In addition to outlining three of the situational constraints that influenced the decision to adopt undergraduate facilitators, this paper also addresses the following

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[1]Hill, Susan E. Kogler, "A Peer Facilitator Program for Interpersonal Competence Training Groups," Communication Education, 30 (July, 1981), pp. 283-286; Seiler, William J., "PSI: An Attractive Alternative for the Basic Speech Communication Courses," Communication Education, 32 (January, 1983), pp. 15-28. Bassett, Ronald E. and Browning, Larry D., "Recommendations for the Evaluation of Improvement of Graduate Teaching Assistants' Instructional Effectiveness," Association for Communication Administration Bulletin, (August, 1978), pp. 42-44. DeBoer, Kathryn B., "Teacher Preparation for Graduate Assistants," Communication Education, 28 (September, 1979), pp. 328-331. Staton-Spicer, Ann Q., and Nyquist, Jody L., "Improving the Teaching Effectiveness of Graduate Teaching Assistants," Communication Education, 28 (July, 1979), pp. 199-205. Kaufman-Evertt, Ileen N. Backlund, Philip M., "AStudy of Training Programs for Graduate Teaching Assistants," Association for Communication Administration Bulletin, (October, 1981), p. 51.

considerations relevant to Departments interested in considering the use of novice instructors: 1) The development of selection criteria and a training program for undergraduate facilitators; 2) A description of the cost effectiveness of the undergraduate facilitator program; and, 3) An empirical examination of the student's acceptance of being instructed by other undergraduate students.

Three Situational Factors that Influenced the Decision to Use Facilitators

While many factors influenced the Department's decision to employ undergraduate facilitators, three factors were particulary salient at the University of Dayton ; The increase in communication majors and the subsequent shortage of full time faculty members, the potential for over reliance on part time faculty, and the inavailability of graduate teaching assistants.

In the three year period preceding the 1978-1979 school year, the number of undergraduate communication majors more than doubled -- from 200 to 500 students. As might be expected, the University administration was unable to increase full time faculty positions to meet the increase in student enrollment. Consequently, during the 1978-1979 academic year 41 of 55 basic course sections were taught by part time faculty since virtually all of the full time faculty were needed to staff the upper division courses offered within the Department.

With over 75% of the public speaking course sections being taught by part time faculty, many problems arose. Standardization of the course was nearly impossible without monumental administrative effort. In addition to structuring the course content, the expense of using part time faculty was becoming a prohibitive budgetary expense and a threat to securing future tenure track positions in the Department. Such difficulties with employing part time faculty are not unique to the University of Dayton .

While many Universities with graduate programs rely on graduate teaching assistants instead of part time instructors to teach the basic courses, the University of Dayton is not so fortunate. The graduate program in Communication Arts attracts part time students who are employed and live in the metropolitan area. Consequently, the availability of graduate teaching assistants is highly variant from semester to semester making it difficult to rely on graduate assistants to staff the basic course.

As a consequence of these three situational constraints, the University of Dayton elected to utilize undergraduate Communication majors as facilitators in the basic public speaking course. While this alternative seemed the most reasonable solution to the staffing problem, the use of novice instructors also necessitated careful selection criteria and training programs to make them effective in the classroom. The next section of this paper outlines the selection criteria and training program employed at the University of Dayton .

Selection Criteria

While no set of selection criteria can fit every specific case or be successful at every University, the criteria for selecting Undergraduate students to be instructors was given careful consideration. The criteria employed at the University of Dayton was as follows:

> The student must be a declared Communication Arts major with a cumulative grade point average of 3.0. The student must have completed the basic public speaking course, a course in persuasion, and a course in Interpersonal Communication earning at least a "B" in each course. Additionally, students must agree to teach the course during their senior year, be available for training during the spring semester, and submit two letters of recommendation from full time faculty members. The students are also expected to prepare a statement explaining why they want to teach the course and why they feel capable of doing so.

Even with the stringent requirements, nearly 30 applicants fulfilled the minimum requirements and six were selected to receive training in teaching the basic public speaking course.

Training Program Description

The student facilitators undergo training during the spring semester of their Junior year. The students enroll in an independent study course under the supervision of the Program Director and attend the class as if they were enrolled in the course. In addition to "retaking" the course, each student must successfully complete a series of assignments in which they evaluate oral performances of students. Weekly meetings are also compulsory, during which teaching methods and strategies are discussed.

During the first term each facilitator must attend weekly meetings in which the content for the week is discussed. The student then attends the class that they have been assigned twice weekly to evaluate student performances and answer any questions that the students may have about the course. The Program Director lectures on the average once each week ensuring that there is uniformity and consistency between the sections of the course. Each facilitator must also keep office hours during the semester and the course director monitors every class at least twice each semester. The facilitators earn a grade for their performance as an instructor and the students evaluate the instructors using the same instrument that is used throughout the University.

The second term is essentially the same as the first with one difference: the students earn no academic credit and are paid for their services as a regular student employee. While the monies are nominal ($450.00), the pay is comparable to other student jobs around campus.

Cost Effectiveness of the Program

Given the current financial restraints placed on innovation in higher education, a favorable cost analysis was essential. In the first four years of the program, the use of undergraduate instructors has resulted in substantial savings for the Department and the University.

Actual dollar outlay for each section of the basic course taught by a facilitator is $450.00. In comparison, full time faculty receive 1/8 of their annual salary, part time faculty cost the department $1,200.00, and graduate teaching assistants $1,120.00. Accounting for administrative costs incurred by the program and using part time faculty as the comparative figure (which is actually lower than full time faculty salaries) the savings have been as follows:

1979-1980	= $10,500.00
1980-1981	= $ 6,200.00
1981-1982	= $ 6,200.00
1982-1983	= $10,500.00
total savings	$33,400.00

Student Acceptance of the Program

Regardless of need, rigor in training, and dollar savings, student acceptance of being taught by other undergraduates (albeit seniors) loomed as the most critical factor in the continuance and success of the program. Gaining student acceptance is crucial to a private, Catholic university which stresses quality instruction as its paramount concern. A negative reaction from the students, other academic units, or the administration would have resulted in reconsideration of the innovative program. To date the other academic units have responded favorably as has the administration. Student reactions, however were not so easy to assess and as a consequence the Department attempted to ascertain student acceptance by comparing the course evaluations of the novice instructors with those of the full time faculty, the part time faculty and the graduate teaching assistants over the past four years. Thus, research question one asks:

> Do undergraduate students evaluate undergraduate facilitators less favorably than they evaluate graduate assistants, part time instructors, and/or full time faculty members?

METHODS

The present study investigated whether undergraduate facilitators were as well accepted in the classroom as graduate ansistants, part time instructors, and full time faculty members. As a matter of University policy, every course and instructor are evaluated by the students using a standardized course evaluation instrument. While the course evaluation measures student satisfaction with the instructor and the course, it seems reasonable that teachers who are not accepted by the students would be less positively evaluated than teachers who are accepted by the students. In short, the measure of instructor acceptance was operationally defined as the composite score obtained on the course evaluation instrument.

This score, the arithmetic mean of the student's responses to 18 Likert-type items, represents student perceptions of teacher preparation, organization, fairness, as well as overall satisfaction with the course and with the instructor. Previous split-half reliability estimates have consistantly resulted in internal consistency coefficients exceeding .80.

The subjects were primarely freshman students enrolled in the basic public speaking course. With a total of 63 sections of the introductory course under analysis in this investigation, approximately 1,500 students responded to the course evaluation process. Each student evaluated the instructor on a 5 point Likert-type scale. As indicated earlier, the composite score obtained on the 18 items were summed to create an index of teacher acceptance. Fourteen full time faculty, 18 part time faculty, 15 graduate assistants, and 13 undergraduate facilitators were evaluated and constitute the four groups compared in this study. Teacher acceptance scores could range from 0 to 4.0 with 4.0 representing the highest evaluation obtainable.

Due to the sensitive nature of the data and strict University policy controlling course evaluation information, class means were employed to test

hypothesis one. While this limitation has no effect on subsequent statistical analyses, reliability estimates were impossible to calculate.

From the means available, a one-way analysis of variance design was employed to test whether students differed in their acceptance of undergraduate facilitators, graduate assistants, instructors, and full-time faculty members as teachers of the basic course. A .05 alpha level was established a priori as the minimum criterion for determining statistical significance.

RESULTS

Research question one which stated "Do undergraduate students evaluate undergraduate facilitators less favorably than they evaluate graduate students, part time instructors, and/or full time instructors was not supported ($F=1.03$; d.f.=3/56; p .39). It appears, then, that undergraduate students were no less accepting of undergraduate facilitators than they were of graduate students, instructors, or full time faculty members. (see Table 1)

DISCUSSION

After four years of use, the undergraduate facilitator program has been a successful means of staffing the basic course at the University of Dayton The situational constraints discussed earlier (i.e. inavailability of graduate teaching assistants, declining economy resulting in lower levels of University support, and the desire to remain less dependent on part time instructors) have led the Department of Communication Arts to use a resource that is not only readily available but seemingly quite effective. Significant reductions in operating expenses, decreased dependence on part time staff and an opportunity to allow undergraduate students a tremendous educational experience are only three positive outcomes that have resulted from the facilitator program. The program encourages a great deal of student - teacher interaction and seems to have increased the status of majoring in Communication Arts in several instances. These consequences seem to

indicate that the program is not only potentially an effective means of staffing the basic course but also an important educational experience for undergraduate Communication majors.

In addition to being an economically viable means of staffing the basic course, saving over $33,000 dollars in four years, the undergraduate students seem to be accepting of the program. Significant differences were not observed between the teacher evaluations of the facilitators and full time faculty, part time faculty or graduate teaching assistants. While not empirically tested, the number of student complaints are no more frequent in the facilitators classes than they are in other class rooms. Using the criteria outlined at the onset of this instructional innovation, the program has been remarkably successful.

This is not to suggest, however, that the University of Dayton is completely satisfied with the program, nor are we suggesting that the evaluation of the program is complete. Quite the contrary, many questions need to be asked and investigated. The use of course evaluations is at best a gross measure of teacher effectiveness in the classroom. To date, all we can say is that the students seem to evaluate the facilitators much the same that they evaluate other teachers in the Department of Communication Arts. Future research evaluating the facilitator program needs to employ behavioral dependent measures of learning and oral performance.

Specifically, future research investigating the effectiveness of the facilitator program needs to determine if the students instructed by facilitators are comparable in terms of their public speaking skills and the cognitive components of the course to the students instructed by more experienced teachers. Questions such as are the students as knowledgable about the course content or as capable as public speakers need to be asked. Without such evidence it is impossible to accurately determine the effectiveness of the program. Yet, the initial impressions of the program have been highly favorable in all quarters, encouraging the continuance of the facilitator program.

Using standardized tests within the basic course and a panel of speech evaluators such questions can be answered and are the next step in the evaluation of this instructional program. Additional research, however, is necessary to substantiate the relative effectiveness of the facilitator program and is ongoing at this time. Such research seems not only advisable but imperative for all colleges and unviersities if we are to understand what makes an instructor effective or inneffective and how we can improve our teaching methods and practices.

TABLE I

Mean scores of undergraduate facilitators, graduate assistants, part time instructors and full time faculty by instructor acceptance.

$F=1.03$; d.f.=3/56; $p>.38$	$\bar{x}$	n
Undergraduate Facilitators	2.95	13
Graduate Assistants	3.09	15
Part Time Instructors	3.04	18
Full Time Faculty	2.92	14

Duncan's Multiple Range Test Critical Value = 0.21